

# Some ugly facts to scare you into saving the world

## First, the bad news...

- Americans generate more than 400,000 tons of garbage everyday, at a rate greater than any other nation on Earth.
- American consumers and industry throw away enough aluminum to rebuild our entire commercial aircraft every three months.
- We throw away enough office and writing paper annually to build a wall 12 feet high stretching from Los Angeles to New York City.
- Ninety percent of all office waste is waste paper, most of which is recyclable.
- Every Sunday, more than 500,000 trees are used to produce the 88 percent of newspapers that are never recycled.
- We throw away enough glass bottles and jars to fill the 1,350-foot twin towers of New York's World Trade Center every two weeks.
- Americans go through 2.5 million plastic bottles every hour, only a small percentage of which are now recycled.
- Plastic drink bottles take 200 years to disintegrate in landfills.



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- The average American currently produces about 3.6 pounds of solid waste each day, or a total of 160 million tons in 1989.
  - We create enough garbage each day to fill the New Orleans Superdome twice.
  - We throw away enough iron and steel to continuously supply all the nation's automakers.
  - In 45 years the greenhouse effect could cause sea levels to rise enough to engulf many low-lying coastal cities.
  - In 30 years an area the size of India will have been turned into desert.
  - Every year an area of forest the size of the United Kingdom is destroyed.
  - The world is losing between 3 and 50 species per day.
  - By the year 2000 we will have removed 65 percent of forests in humid tropical zones.
  - The world's farmers are losing 24 billion tons of topsoil each year, equal to all the topsoil covering Australia's wheatlands.
  - Each year 2.7 billion pounds of pesticides are being added to the environment across the United States.
- Compiled by Aaron Sheinin, The Gamecock, U. of South Carolina. Source: EPA*

## ...but hope springs eternal

- Teach friends, fellow students, and family by example to prevent pollution.
- Write elected officials and tell them your environmental concerns.
- Recycle paper, glass, plastic, aluminum, scrap metal, motor oil and yard wastes.
- Use less energy. Set your thermostat back, insulate your water heater, and buy energy efficient appliances.
- Buy energy efficient cars and keep them tuned. Carpool, bike, walk or use mass transit when possible.
- Reduce smoke, radon, asbestos and other indoor air pollutants.
- Buy only as much potentially toxic materials or products as you need. Dispose of them properly.
- Buy recycled or recyclable products in biodegradable, reusable or returnable packages.
- Cut plastic beverage container rings before trashing. If left uncut they could trap and kill birds and other small creatures.
- Plant trees and shrubs and buy indoor plants. They replenish the Earth's oxygen supply.



- Repair leaky faucets. A leaky faucet can use up to 4,000 gallons of water per month.
  - Install faucet aerators. These inexpensive devices can reduce water use up to 60 percent, while maintaining a strong flow.
  - When cooking, save 10-15 gallons of water by peeling and cleaning vegetables in a large bowl of water instead of under running water.
  - When handwashing dishes, save 15 gallons of water by soaking dirty dishes in the basin and then rinsing them off.
  - Take short showers instead of baths. Showers use about 5-7 gallons per minute, three times less than the water in a bath.
  - Turn off the water to brush teeth, shave and soap up in the shower. Filling the sink to shave uses only one gallon, while letting the water run can use up to 10 gallons. Turning off the water when brushing your teeth can save four gallons.
  - Install a toilet displacement device to save thousands of gallons of water each year. Placing 1-3 weighted jugs in the tank will save one or two gallons each flush.
- Compiled by T.R. Hanrahan, The Chart, Missouri Southern State College. Source: EPA*

## Pushing the right buttons How to bug politicians for environmental change

By DION NISSENBAUM  
*The Daily Californian, U. of California, Berkeley*

In 1970, the first Earth Day dawned, the Clean Air Act passed, and activists dreamed of a new environmental age. Twenty years later, after the growing disillusionment of battling an unresponsive bureaucracy, environmental organizations succeeded in lobbying for sufficient enforcement clauses to actually implement the measure. It was a long struggle, the groups say, but well worth the fight. "Social change is a slow process," said Andy Shaw, a California campaign director with the California Public Interest Research Group (CALPIRG). "We've lost some battles, but we're winning the war over the years."

Such is the life of environmental activists. Organizations like PIRG are leading the fight to make the environment a top priority in Washington, D.C., and challenging individuals to continue the fight. "This is the beginning of an era," said Mark Trautwein, energy consultant to Congressman George Miller (D-Calif.). "Public awareness of environmental quality is growing and it's becoming a button to push if you frame the debate properly." While the nation's capital is perceived as impenetrable, both environmental groups and House and Senate staffers say individuals can make a difference, if they know how. Bill Calder, press secretary for Sen. Mark Hatfield (R-Ore.), agreed that anyone who wants to effect change in the nation's capital has to organize by developing a coalition or joining an existing coalition. That is a sentiment echoed by environmental groups that have been working in the capital for decades. Organizations from PIRG to Greenpeace to the fledgling Student Environmental Action Coalition say the first step toward

swaying lawmakers is working with local activists on local issues. "The way you build clout with Congress is to build grassroots support in the (congressional) district," said Daniel Silverman, assistant field director for U.S. PIRG. Various environmental groups have developed differing tactics to catch legislators' attention. While some organizations rely on letter-writing campaigns to swing a vote, others organize controversial demonstrations and protests. "If you just have a demonstration it's not likely to change people's votes," Trautwein said. "But if the demonstration is connected with letters and visits with constituents and a media campaign that has poll results — then, yes, you can have an effect." There seems to be unanimous agreement among lobbyists and politicians that letters, faxes, telegrams and phone calls to legislators are truly effective.

"People often feel that letters and phone calls go down a rat hole," Trautwein said. "But people would be surprised at how much attention legislators pay to their mail." Legislators pay attention to mail, he said, but usually ignore correspondence from non-voters. This can work against students, who are often perceived as apathetic and uninvolved. "I don't think students (currently) do a whole lot of influencing... because they are not perceived as a voting block or a constituent with an interest that an elected official needs to be conscious of," Trautwein said. For that reason, Greenpeace youth organizer Marianne Cherni said whenever students organize letter-writing campaigns, they also need to organize voter-registration drives. Organizations also suggest organizing well-prepared personal visits with the congressional representatives when they return to the district. Activist say that visible and "creative" demonstrations at legislators' speaking engagements can bring an issue to the public eye.

**"We've lost some battles, but we're winning the war over the years."**  
— Andy Shaw



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Some organizations working on environmental issues focus their energies not on Washington, D.C., but on local or regional areas. The Student Environmental Action Coalition, a three-year-old organization based in Chapel Hill, N.C., with 30,000 members around the country, encourages students to take a specific concern and work with other groups on an extended campaign. While the entire process of change may be slow, activists say the system shouldn't discourage students from fighting. "There is reason to be cynical," Shaw said. "But if you look at the past two decades and you think of where environmentalism has come, you have to be happy. It's gotten to the point where people can now be environmentalists and hold their heads high."